



Northern Virginia Ki Aikido (NVKA) / Virginia Ki Society (VKS)
Newsletter for August, 2021
www.novakiaikido.org

This Week's Topics

- I. Dojo calendar (incl. upcoming events and **NEW!** children's class message)
 - II. Clarity: Empathy and Forgiveness (short essay)
 - III. Upcoming events
 - IV. Weekly Shokushu: Living calmness
 - V. Book of the month
 - VI. Question (click link to answer): [What do you think is the one thing that the Four Principles describe?](#)
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Dojo Calendar

Current Classes (Adults)

- Monday, 7:15 pm - 9:00 pm
- Wednesday, 7:15 pm - 9:00 pm
- Saturday, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

Current Classes (Children)

- Saturday, 10:00 am - 11:00 am

****Note:** All adult classes are now contact classes, including ki testing and techniques. The children's class will be no contact for the time being.*

(NEW!) Message from Children's class teacher, Marion Sensei:

We restarted our children's program the first Saturday in June. We have class from 10:00 - 11:00 am every Saturday morning. With all our students under 12 years old, and therefore unable to be vaccinated yet, we use masks, have no contact, and keep a 3 foot distance. Although we still can't do many things (no throws, ki tests, and some of our favorite games), we are still having fun and enjoying being on the mat together. We do stretches, hitori waza, ukemi, jo, bokken, games, and shadow box techniques. We had some returning students (one who turned 13 in July and has moved on to the adult classes), and we have several new students, who have been learning to roll, knee walk, and use weapons. We are very pleased that the children's class is back.

Upcoming Events

- EKF Zoom Training: Thursday, August 5 (6:30 pm - 7:30 pm EST), Saturday, August 21 (8:00 am - 9:00 am EST), and Thursday, August 26 (6:30 pm - 7:30 pm EST)
- 2021 Miles Kessler Sensei USA Seminar at Aikido in Fredericksburg: Saturday, September 4 (9:00 am - 4:00 pm EST) and Sunday, September 5 (9:00 am - 1:00 pm EST)

Clarity

Empathy and Forgiveness

In the last addition of Clarity we deepened our understanding of what it means to center. We noticed how centering helps us realize who we are in essence: a vessel (i.e., bodymind/consciousness) through which experience passes.

In this essay we will explore this a little further in terms of empathy and forgiveness.

To do this, we first consider the concept of "givenness". This may be defined as pre-reflective experience as it is given to consciousness. That is, experience before we "posit [our] own affective notions regarding time, space, self, existence, and so on." (Shaner, D., *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism*, p184) In terms of centering, this experience includes all coincident forces (i.e., Ki or energy) that continually facilitate movement and equilibrium. In other words, "givenness" describes a primal connection to the Universe *as it is*.

This brings us to forgiveness. For this we'll turn to an excerpt from a meditation the author wrote for the Jewish High Holiday Yom Kippur, which consists of fasting, atoning for any regretted behavior over the past year, and letting go of everything to bring ourselves closer to G-d or, one might argue, our own essence: "Forgiveness begins with letting go of the attachments and resentments that you hold, righteous or not. You can release the notion that you can change the past. You can let go of anger that suffocates the heart and soul. Too often we mistake forgiveness as an absolution of another person (or of ourselves) and do not understand its primary purpose is to enable life itself, to remove the obstacles within us that obscure and block essence so it can flow through us."

Forgiveness allows bodymind to be a vessel for experiencing the world as it is given to consciousness -- it allows bodymind and consciousness to simultaneously act as a conduit for "givenness" (i.e., forgiveness).

So, how does empathy fit in? First, let's define empathy a little more clearly. In fact, it is not just one thing. According to our book of the month, *The War For Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World*, empathy experts generally agree there are three types of empathy:

- Cognitive empathy: knowing another's experience
- Emotional empathy: feeling another's experience
- Caring/Compassion: motivation to improve someone else's wellbeing

It turns out that forgiveness, whether towards others or ourselves, functions as an expression of compassionate empathy. How? Because when experience flows unimpeded we are most alive, most well, most free, most stable, closest to fine (to paraphrase the Indigo Girls). In its purest form, this is first order awareness. And, crucially, "givenness" goes two ways: the Universe is "given" to us but we also are part of what's "given" to others. So, when we achieve higher states, we commit the act of compassion by "giving" those states to others -- this is the basis of service. We can literally see this reciprocal relationship happening in every Ki Aikido technique performed between uke and nage.

So, when you go through the Hitori Waza, know that you are practicing the Four Principles of Mind and Body Unification. And, when you perform techniques using the Five Principles of Practice (Shinshin Toitsu) and you understand your partner's intent (cognitive empathy), respect your partner's Ki (cognitive empathy), and put yourself in your partner's place (emotional empathy) to lead everyone to a safe place (compassion/self-compassion), know that you are also practicing empathy and forgiveness for daily life.

Shokushu Reading

Read the "Clarity" essay above for an exploration of this reading.

7. LIVING CALMNESS

In a natural state, the weight of objects is always underside. Therefore, the physical expression of living calmness is that the weight of every part of our body is also underside. Like the calm, still surface of the water that reflects the moon and a flying bird, true living calmness is the condition of our mind that reflects all living things clearly. This is our original and natural state. By understanding these principles, we can acquire true living calmness.

Book of the Month

This is a space we will periodically use to highlight a favorite book that has helped deepen our understanding and practice of Ki Aikido. This month's book is *The War For Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World* by Jamil Zaki. Check it out!

As you may have guessed, this book is primarily about empathy. We may ask: How does empathy pertain to Ki Aikido? Well, it's right there in the Five Principles of Practice (Shinshin Toitsu): Understand your partner's intention, respect your partner's Ki, and take the place of your partner. In other words, it's the "blend" in blending art. This is a critical part of applying Ki Aikido training to keep everyone safe in daily life.

In a particularly powerful chapter, the author discusses the group Life After Hate, which works to help people in extremist groups get out of those groups and change their life trajectory. This work requires a no-judgment, empathic approach, and we include an excerpt below (p70-71) that describes the core of what it means to

empathize with those with whom you may profoundly disagree and whose ideologies you may even abhor, and the impact doing it can have on the world:

"...[we] then shared research on hatred and how to address it. We focused on nudges that make it easier for people to get to know outsiders and harder to stereotype them. We bounced strategies around the room for a while, but the Life After Hate members pushed back. "You're trying to problem-solve this..., but in these interventions, you're not a problem solver. That's a trap." Hate group members *expect* people to try to change their minds. In preparation, they construct...a "fortress of reason": protection against any argument, through counterpoints, rhetorical tricks, or plain old threats.

To get past those defenses, Life After Hate begins in a different place. "The goal can't be to change a person right away.... You first need to show genuine interest in them, listen to what they have to say, and then maybe after a while find something to hold on to." [This] sounded like the legendary therapist Carl Rogers. Rogers felt that a psychologist's most important job is to truly listen to their patient, full of curiosity and free of judgment. Hate group members are ready to be cast away by anyone who doesn't agree with them, which is pretty much everyone else. [Life After Hate members] all once believed that everyone else *should* hate them. To puncture that shame, someone had to show them genuine empathy.

[A Life After Hate member] made clear that empathizing with a hate group member is not the same as validating their beliefs. "You absolutely judge the ideology, the hatred, but you don't judge the person." Even that sounds like a tall order. Why spend any energy validating someone who's covered in genocidal tattoos? No one is obligated to return hate with love.... But in accepting them,... outsiders gave [Life After Hate members] a chance to feel compassion for themselves. **That compassion washed away the anger that had sprung from their shame.** [emphasis added]

[Researchers] believed that contact was a matter of changing people's minds about outsiders. But people who had been in the trenches were telling us something else: Contact had changed how they viewed themselves...."

Upcoming Events

EKF Zoom Training

Email from Rich Fryling Sensei, Head Instructor, NYKA:

It is my pleasure to announce the following schedule of online EKF classes. I am excited for everyone to attend.

We will have an opportunity to train on **Thursday, August 5th @ 6:30pm est** using a live, moderated recording of last Saturday's class.

Attarian Sensei will lead an online class on **Saturday, August 21st @ 8:00am est.**

We will have another opportunity to train on **Thursday, August 26th @ 6:30pm est** using a live, moderated recording of the Saturday class. This will not only give the Saturday participants the opportunity to review the class but also give those who could not attend on Saturday an opportunity to participate in the training.

All of this training is to further reinforce the overall theme that we've been developing around “**Ki no Shurenho**”. This means ways to practice, drill, repeat activities in order to make a habit of unifying mind and body in the dojo as well as ways to practice outside the dojo by repeating again and again unified movements in daily life.

Please feel free to share the below Zoom link with your EKF students. And similar to our previous online classes, we ask that you do not share the link information on social media. This is primarily for security reasons.

As we return to the dojo setting, we will conduct our classes in alignment with the Zoom classes offered in Japan. As a reminder for those planning to participate next Saturday, I've attached the **online training protocols**. Please take the time to review these as well as pass them on to your students.

Wishing you plus ki,

Rich

Member Feedback

We would love to hear from you with any suggestions, concerns, questions, etc regarding anything dojo-related. Please don't be shy. Is there anything you're liking or not liking about the dojo? Is there anything you wish was different or don't want to change? Want to tell us what you LOVE about the newsletter (or would like to change)? Just want to chat? Please feel free to send us an email at vkdojo@gmail.com with anything on your mind. The door is always open!

THANK YOU! We hope to see you back on the mat soon.

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